United Nations S/PV.8206

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8206th meeting

Friday, 16 March 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Van Oosterom	(Netherlands)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Teny
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mr. Miller

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-07334 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. De Mistura is joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Brussels.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Recalling the Security Council's latest note 507 on its working methods (S/2017/507), I wish to encourage all participants, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and to focus on key issues. Briefers are further encouraged to limit initial remarks to 15 minutes or less.

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: We have been constantly, around the clock, in touch with the Secretary-General, my colleagues in the field and all those with influence because, as the Security Council knows, many events, some of which are very worrisome, have taken place in the past few days.

On 7 March, I briefed the Council in consultations on the status of the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). At that time, I said that there had not been any sustained ceasefire or adequate humanitarian access at that stage. On 12 March, the Secretary-General himself orally reported to the Council on the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) and United Nations efforts to create such conditions by using his own good offices or those of his own team, including ourselves (see S/PV.8201). The Secretary-General also underscored that it was incumbent on all the parties and on all those with influence in the Council, in the Astana process and in the broader International Syria Support Group to act on the resolution throughout Syria without delay.

Allow me to update the Council on where we stand on the matter since then — that is, since the Secretary-General gave a very comprehensive report — on the very day after the sad anniversary of the beginning of the conflict. We are entering the eighth year. In everything that we are doing in the horrific conflict, our compass — and I know the Council feels the same — has been, is and should be the Syrian people, wherever they are, who are telling us that they are fed up with the conflict and the way in which civilians are being affected in the cross-fighting. That is our compass. So whatever we do these days and whatever we suggest, including our current facilitation role, is constantly framed by the urgent needs of ordinary civilians — women, children and men.

Since the briefing by the Secretary-General, in the past few days further meetings have taken place between the Russian Federation and Jaysh Al-Islam on the outskirts of Douma, which is the northernmost of the three opposition-controlled enclaves in eastern Ghouta. The result of that engagement is a tenuous and fragile ceasefire between the Government, the Russian military and the Jaysh Al-Islam forces, which has now largely continued to hold for the sixth day. We hope that it will continue to do so, notwithstanding the engagement between Government forces and Jaysh Al-Islam in other areas outside Douma, such as the village of Reihan. In other words, the talks, the discussions and the ceasefire have been effected and implemented with Jaysh Al-Islam in Douma but not beyond.

However, that is only one part of eastern Ghouta. For example, the ceasefire is not being replicated in the rest of eastern Ghouta or elsewhere, and it is extremely fragile. While I speak, I understand that at this very moment there are some delicate meetings taking place regarding the follow-up to the arrangement regarding Douma. Let us therefore hope that the ceasefire holds because that would be at least one good piece of news among very bad news.

The United Nations has been practicably offering its good offices but efforts to facilitate meaningful contacts between the Russian Federation and Faylaq Al-Rahman or Ahrar Al-Sham have not yet produced results. They are dominant forces in the two other enclaves in eastern Ghouta — in Harasta and around Kafr Batna, Ayn Tarma, Arbin, Zamalka and Jobar, respectively. In those two other areas, we have not seen any ceasefire to speak of. Rather we have seen Government forces and their allies pursue a concerted escalation against those two enclaves with rapid ground offensives, accompanied by shelling and airstrikes. Reports of a public market in Kafr Batna having been

hit are just coming in. Of course, we need to verify them, since they are new reports.

Again, regrettably, there are numerous civilian casualties. We have also seen continuous shelling coming from those areas of eastern Ghouta inside civilian areas of Damascus again. We are also hearing from people inside eastern Ghouta, asking the United Nations, the Council and Member States with influence to pressure the armed opposition groups to let civilians leave and to pressure all parties for a ceasefire and protection for those who do not want to leave but want to stay. The bottom line of all this is that too many civilians are suffering and too many have died in that area.

Let me first say that it need not be that way. Negotiations in Douma in the past few days show that there is a way to create the conditions to advance the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). As we have done so far, the United Nations therefore stands ready to offer its good offices to all parties to facilitate further engagement of that kind so as to make a concrete contribution to the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) in all areas of eastern Ghouta. The United Nations is not ready to facilitate ultimatums from either side. It stands ready to facilitate discussion, a ceasefire and evacuations. Meanwhile, violence has escalated across many other parts of Syria, where there is no ceasefire to speak of. In Afrin, the Turkish Government forces and their armed allies continue to gain ground rapidly. We have also received reports of shelling in besieged Fo'ah and Kafraya — two villages which, for a long time, have been held by the opposition. There have also been air strikes in Idlib and a new armed-opposition offensive in Hama. Clashes and air strikes have also occurred in Dar'a, southern Syria.

If now is the time for de-escalation, the Security Council had better convince me that de-escalation is indeed taking place. What we see on the map looks like the opposite — escalation. Let me re-emphasize that resolution 2401 (2018) cannot be applied piecemeal. It is not an à la carte menu. It applies to all non-Security-Council-listed terrorist groups across Syria. Let me also reiterate the words of the Secretary-General who stated that even efforts to combat terrorist groups identified by the Council do not supersede obligations under international law.

I am sure that members of the Council will have the opportunity to hear a briefing from Mr. Mark Lowcock. Meanwhile, since I have the opportunity to brief the Council today, let me provide some information about the humanitarian situation. On 13 March, the United Nations observed the evacuation of 147 civilians, including 10 critical medical cases — the majority of them women and children from Douma who sought shelter in rural Damascus. Based on the outcome of discussions and meetings between the Russian military and Jaysh al-Islam, facilitated by the United Nations, on 15 March, United Nations colleagues also delivered a convoy of food assistance to Douma for 26,100 people in need. Additional medical cases were also evacuated.

Let us be honest and admit that positive efforts are generally welcome and long overdue, but remain limited. Civilians require much more, including medical and health-care supplies, the restoration of water, commercial access and freedom of movement. Members of the Council must have seen the report in which Mr. Peter Maurer, who had been meeting with some of the people in eastern Ghouta, stated they were simply asking for water. They just needed water. Humanitarian colleagues who entered those areas spoke of having seen hunger, dire want, poverty, haggard faces and despair all around. Even for experienced people, such as my own humanitarian colleagues, it is an unsustainable situation in which people are on the brink of collapse a few kilometres — 20 minutes' drive — from Damascus. Let me be clear, that is only in Douma — an area which has seen a few days of ceasefire and positive movement on humanitarian access. Can we imagine the situation elsewhere? In other words, in the other two enclaves of eastern Ghouta further south, we have seen no ceasefire to speak of and to borrow the words of the Secretary-General, people are still living in hell on Earth.

Scores of people have been killed and wounded left unattended because health workers could not reach them due to the relentless air strikes. We have heard fresh allegations about the use of incendiary weapons in various urban areas and the targeting of medical facilities since 12 March, as well as new and disturbing allegations of chlorine use in those areas. As the Secretary-General has stated, we cannot independently verify those allegations but we also cannot and should not ignore them. We have also received reports of thousands of people displaced, some moving further into eastern Ghouta and many others exiting en masse in large groups, as a result of the advances of the Syrian Government in Hama, Noria and in Saqba.

Evacuations not observed by the United Nations are also reported to have taken place, including from Misraba and other areas. The United Nations was not present to observe those evacuations and is unable to know the precise number of them. We urge parties that all evacuations must take place in accordance with the highest protection standards under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Whether civilians choose to stay or leave, they must be protected against attacks and have access to the essentials to survive. They must be safe and voluntarily enter a place of their of choosing. The United Nations stands ready to provide assistance to people in need — those who choose to stay and those who want to leave.

We are also extremely concerned about the plight of civilians throughout Syria. They include the displaced, as well as almost 3 million in besieged and hard-to-reach areas and those caught up in escalations in Idlib, Hama, Aleppo and Dar'a. Resolution 2401 (2018) demands that all parties immediately lift the sieges of populated areas. To date, that has not occurred. According to my colleagues, the situation in Afrin is particularly worrying. We have received reports of tens of thousands of people displaced within Afrin and to nearby Tell Rifaat and surrounding villages, Nubul and Zahra, and other areas of Aleppo governorate.

The United Nations has also received reports of civilian casualties and restrictions on movement for many of the large numbers of civilians seeking to leave the city. I urge all parties to ensure that civilians seeking to leave Afrin be given safe passage. Since 6 March, it has been reported that people in Afrin city have suffered from severe water shortages as its source of water has been damaged by the fighting.

Allow me to add a point of particular importance that was revealed in a recent report. The safety of Syrian women in particular is threatened when they are evacuated following the lifting of a siege or end of a battle. Threats include widespread sexual and gender-based violence, which has been widely documented and mentioned by women's groups. The protection and needs of women must be at the forefront of our response.

With regard to a separate humanitarian issue, on 14 March my technical team participated in the first meeting of the Working Group on detainees and missing persons that took place in Astana. We pressed the Astana guarantors at that meeting and before to make progress on the crucial issue, which to us, is one of the main reasons we attend meetings in Astana. It is an issue that has been at the forefront of our concerns. We have offered to host a standing secretariat so that information on detainees can be distributed in all meetings of the Working Group. Thus far, the guarantors have simply agreed to consider our proposal about a standing secretariat in Geneva to monitor the issue of detainees, but no final decision has been taken. We will intensify our contact with them and the parties in order to accelerate work on that important — frankly, crucial — humanitarian issue. We should remind ourselves that the issue of detainees and missing persons was first raised in Astana a year ago and, sadly, no concrete progress has been made so far. We owe it to the Syrian families on all sides who have long been awaiting word on the fate of their relatives.

Although the logic of war clearly still prevails and resolution 2401 (2018) is not being implemented as it should be, as the Secretary-General stated, we absolutely refuse to give up hope of seeing Syria rising from the ashes. The Syrian people deserve to be helped. The Syrian people are proud. They love their country. We need to help them to go back to having a normal country. There too, it is with the people of Syria in mind and their legitimate aspirations for the long-term shape of their country that we continue our political efforts — in spite of what we see on the ground — for a sustainable settlement of the conflict. And there too, the voices of women across Syria conveying their wish to play a meaningful role — just as with our own civil society — in the next stage of the political process must be heard.

Therefore, my team and I have continued to consult, in the context of the political side, widely and intensively on the formation of the constitutional committee in Geneva in an effort to advance the full and complete implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) within the framework of the United Nations-facilitated political process in Geneva. To this end, we seek to leverage the momentum produced by the Sochi final declaration, which emphasizes the fact that we should have a constitutional committee in Geneva with the assistance of the United Nations. We take note, therefore, of the statement issued — today, I believe — by the Astana guarantors in their own ministerial meeting, in which they reaffirmed that

> "the results of the Sochi Congress, especially to form the constitutional committee and to facilitate the

beginning of its work in Geneva with the assistance of the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria as soon as possible."

However, I have to be frank. I must report that at this stage — more than two weeks beyond one month since the National Dialogue Congress in Sochi — we have not yet received the complete inputs on the pool of candidates for a constitutional committee developed in Sochi, from the three guarantors. It is my intention, in close consultations with all concerned, to look carefully at this pool when we receive it, and at others as required and consistent with resolution 2254 (2015), to facilitate the establishment of the constitutional committee. I must also report, once again, that there is still some serious homework to be done regarding the Syrian Government's readiness to engage on implementing the Sochi final declaration and moving forward with a constitutional committee in Geneva. I have impressed that on the relevant guarantors repeatedly in recent weeks, just as I continue to make clear the readiness of the United Nations to engage the Government of Syria on this matter. We need them to be part of it. We need to have the comprehensive participation of all Syrian parties.

In the meantime, we have been proactive in offering creative suggestions as to how to expedite the formation of that constitutional committee. We continue to assess various options on how to advance discussions on all four baskets of the political process in Geneva. In particular, it is clear that there must be more and serious talks with the Government, the opposition and all Syrian and international stakeholders on what is required in order to establish a secure, calm, neutral environment, as per resolution 2254 (2015), in which a constitutional process and United Nations-supervised presidential and parliamentary elections, pursuant to a new constitution, could viably take place. We remained determined to engage all parties.

As I said in my most recent briefing, a month ago (see S/PV.8181), conflict is increasingly spilling over Syria's borders, or at least risks doing so. This month we have further incidents of potential and real international confrontation within Syria that we cannot independently verify, but which concern us. That is precisely we need urgent action on the political front. Syrians need to see some positive movement on the political process.

On Monday I will be attending a meeting of European Union (EU) Foreign Ministers here in Brussels. On Tuesday, I should be back in Geneva. I will attend the meeting at the invitation of High Representative Mogherini, in the context of the preparatory efforts of the EU and the United Nations for their joint ministerial conference in Brussels at the end of April. I hope that the Conference will provide a significant opportunity to bolster international support for the Syrian people though humanitarian commitments. I also hope that the gathering of a significant number of Foreign Ministers will also provide an opportunity to reinvigorate the collective efforts of the international community towards a sustainable peace through the United Nations-led peace process in Geneva, within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015) and other relevant resolutions.

In conclusion, I urge caution. We must recognize that we are witnessing developments of the utmost gravity on the ground. These events demand action, and the world is worried and watching. I remain concerned that concrete matters that we have been trying to advance — resolution 2401 (2018), detainees and a constitutional committee — need to move faster and with more meaningful impact than has so far proven possible. And de-escalation must replace what we are watching at the moment — a clear tendency towards escalation. I will continue, creatively and determinedly, to seek to facilitate the overall political process. As the Secretary-General said on Monday, the ultimate goal is to help the Syrians and to

> "see a united, democratic Syria able to avoid fragmentation and sectarianism and with its sovereignty and territorial integrity respected, and to see a Syrian people able to freely decide their future and choose their political leadership." (*S/PV.8201, p. 5*)

The President: I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting and Mr. De Mistura for his briefing. We are grateful for his tireless and important efforts.

We agree that the continuation of the conflict and the regrettable humanitarian situation in Syria undermines the prospects of making political

progress. The unpunished lack of compliance with international law, international humanitarian law and Security Council resolutions erode the needed trust for sustainable peacebuilding. While we express our deep sympathy and solidarity with the victims, we would like at the same time to indicate our concern over the impact of the Syrian conflict on regional stability, the Council's credibility and the functioning of an rules-based international system.

More specifically, the international community is awaiting an immediate ceasefire throughout Syria, full access to the needed humanitarian assistance, the attainment of a political agreement that could bring about sustainable peace in Syria, and accountability for the heinous crimes committed, including the use of chemical weapons. There can be no more excuses and no more delays. The humanitarian ceasefire, as stipulated in resolution 2401 (2018), must be implemented immediately in eastern Ghouta, Idlib, Afrin, Raqqa, Rukban and throughout Syria.

All parties should commit to resolving the conflict peacefully, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). That will require the constructive participation of the Syrian Government and the opposition groups in establishing a constitutional committee, as agreed in Sochi. We believe that a new constitution must be drafted to lay the political and institutional groundwork for sustainable peace in Syria.

The Syrian Government and all parties to the conflict must rise to the occasion in confronting the gravity of the situation, prevent its further deterioration and escalation, and fulfil their obligations and responsibilities. The Astana guarantors must also meet expectations in terms of the special responsibility entailed by their influence and involvement on the ground. Yesterday's meeting in Astana and the meeting to be held in Istanbul in early April must yield concrete outcomes, including in the matter of those detained and missing.

As a member of the Council, Peru believes that its own responsibility vis-à-vis the tragic humanitarian situation in Syria entails requiring all parties involved in the conflict, especially those with greater ability to influence events on the ground, to comply with international law and international humanitarian law. Peru places priority on the protection of civilians, in particular women and children, and stresses the importance of maintaining the unity of the Council concerning this and all other conflicts and humanitarian crises, wherever they might arise.

In conclusion, we convey our support for Mr. De Mistura's work to encourage dialogue among the Syrian opposition groups that have expressed their willingness to comply with the ceasefire and expel terrorists from eastern Ghouta and other parties to the Syrian conflict.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the initiative of convening this meeting owing to the gravity of the situation on the ground. We also thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. De Mistura, for his informative briefing.

As we continue to seek a solution to the tragic humanitarian situation throughout the country, it is also important to continue pursuing political efforts. We all believe that there is no military solution to the Syrian issue. The international community must continue to support and encourage the intra-Syrian negotiations and impress upon all parties that it is only by sitting around the negotiating table and engaging in frank, direct and inclusive dialogue that a solution can be reached that addresses everyone's concerns. In such a process, we must ensure that the sovereignty and unity of Syria are respected.

We support the United Nations in its mission as a mediator in finding a political solution to the Syrian issue, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015). It is imperative to relaunch negotiations in Geneva and all other peace initiatives, including those in Astana and Sochi, which must lead to the resumption of negotiations in Geneva. The final outcome must ensure the well-being of the Syrian people. Consolidating a political process in Syria will be difficult without eradicating terrorism. The international community must also demonstrate its unfaltering unity by joining forces and following the same criteria to combat the various terrorist organizations operating in Syria.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his update.

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains dire. We echo the United Nations call on all parties to facilitate a ceasefire and unconditional, unimpeded and sustained access to all people in need throughout the country, pursuant to resolution 2401 (2018). It is also vital to take the measures necessary to protect civilians

and civilian infrastructure, including schools and medical facilities, as required under international law and human rights standards.

As members of the Security Council are aware, the guarantor States of the agreement on the cessation of hostilities adopted a joint statement on the settlement of the conflict and its future direction at the meeting of Foreign Ministers on 16 March in Astana. Kazakhstan remains committed to bringing peace to Syria. The situation is not simple, but nevertheless we cannot give up. Kazakhstan has taken the following positions.

First, we do not believe in a military solution, for that would only aggravate an already difficult situation. We need serious compromises from every side. Any conflict — even the most serious — ends with negotiations, and we must strive to achieve the goal of bringing peace to Syria. We know of many fine examples in which conflicting parties in many other countries have come together despite difficult negotiations so as to find common prosperity for their peoples.

Secondly, Kazakhstan calls on the Syrian Government and opposition parties to immediately begin substantive talks on the entire spectrum of issues. Astana does not anticipate any political or international miracles, yet sees great promise in a collective and pragmatic approach. Kazakhstan, for its part, is deeply committed to ending the intense suffering, which has lasted for eight long years.

We all know that today Syria is undergoing a significant challenge that must not lead to a deadlock, but offer new opportunities to pave the way to a peaceful and lasting political settlement to the crisis. We hope that the forthcoming ninth round of talks, to be held in Astana in May, will offer an opportunity to end the war. In that regard, we will urge the guarantors and Syrian parties to overcome their differences through dialogue and reach a final agreement covering every aspect of the issue.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte D'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire thanks Mr. De Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his briefing on the latest developments in the political process and the situation in the country, and for his work to find a solution to the ongoing crisis.

The Ivorian delegation remains concerned about the upsurge in fighting, which with every passing day further distances us from finding a peaceful settlement through political negotiations. Despite the efforts of the international community to establish a ceasefire, we continue to witness indiscriminate attacks and bombardments in eastern Ghouta and other areas in Syria, thereby resulting in a large number of casualties among civilians and the destruction of important infrastructure.

My country therefore calls once again for an immediate cessation of hostilities and urges the international community to work together towards the effective implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). That resolution, which was unanimously adopted by the Security Council, calls for establishing a humanitarian cessation of hostilities of at least 30 days so as to allow for the safe, lasting and unhindered access of humanitarian convoys to deliver essential supplies to the people of eastern Ghouta and other areas in Syria. Should it be implemented, such a temporary cessation of hostilities could not only alleviate the suffering of millions of people living in distress and hopelessness, but also allow for the resumption of political talks among Syrian parties in a peaceful environment. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire hopes that the Astana meeting will lead to a lasting ceasefire, improve the humanitarian situation and establish the conditions for advancing the political process.

My country welcomes all initiatives aimed at reviving the inter-Syrian dialogue and encourages Mr. De Mistura to continue undertaking, within the framework of the Geneva process, the steps needed to set up the committee responsible for drafting Syria's new constitution, as agreed at the meeting in Sochi in the Russian Federation.

In conclusion, my delegation urges the Syrian parties to give priority to dialogue, which is the only way to advance the political process with a view to a definitive end to the crisis, in accordance with the road map laid out by resolution 2254 (2015). That is Côte d'Ivoire's profound conviction and it is in the interests of the Syrian people.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational States of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the briefing given by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to whom we reiterate our support in the discharge of his duties.

As on previous occasions, my delegation wishes to express its support for the various meetings held in

different contexts and at different levels, which have allowed for the creation of de-escalation zones, the cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access. At the same time, we remain converned over the urgent need to advance in a political process that will help to resolve the conflict in Syria so that the people can return to peace.

That is why we again highlight the commitments made at the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held in Sochi on 30 January. It focused on strengthening the political process led by the United Nations within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015), particularly through the drafting of a new constitution by a constitutional committee, which we believe should be representative and neutral. We underscore in particular that the mandate, terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure and selection criteria for the composition of the committee must be agreed in the United Nations-supported talks held in Geneva.

In that regard, we firmly believe that the principles agreed at the Sochi Congress will lead to a strong commitment on the part of the parties to respecting the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, in the context of its right to choose its own political, economic and social systems, without pressure or foreign interference. We are certain that the political process will resume as a result of those dialogues.

However, and despite the advances in the political arena, we remain concerned over the critical situation of the Syrian people. In that regard, we welcome the holding of the Astana meeting and its outcome, and we hope that those political agreements will be reflected on the ground. We also express our greatest hopes for the success of the summit to be held shortly among high-level representatives of Turkey, Iran and Russia. We hope that it will serve to reaffirm the Astana agreements and de-escalation zones with a view to reducing violence and addressing the needs of families of detained, kidnapped and disappeared persons.

Once again, the Council has the challenge of remaining united and calling on the parties involved to join forces and maintain the impetus of the Astana talks and the political process in Sochi, among others, the outcomes of which, we reiterate, must strengthen the political process in Geneva. We hope that those forums for dialogue will promote points of convergence and consensus in order to reduce violence and allow the humanitarian access that is so necessary, not only for the safe and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons, but also to achieve sustainable peace in Syria. To that end, it is crucial for the parties to demonstrate their willingness to seek a settlement to the conflict, which has persisted for more than 8 years.

We again call on all parties involved to effectively implement resolution 2401 (2018) throughout the entire Syrian territory in order to achieve unrestricted humanitarian access and permit the necessary urgent medical evacuations. We reject any attempt at fragmentation or sectarianism in Syria, and believe that the Syrian people must be able to freely decide their future and political leadership within the framework of their sovereignty and territorial integrity. In that regard, we reiterate that the only way to resolve the conflict is through an inclusive, negotiated and concerted political process, led by the Syrian people for the Syrian people, which will enable a peaceful solution for all parties involved.

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

I wish to again remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable to Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syria) (*spoke in Arabic*): On 12 March (see S/PV.8201), I informed the members of the Security Council of a number of measures undertaken by the Syrian Government to alleviate the suffering of Syrians throughout my country caused by armed terrorist groups. Today, I assure those present once again that the Government of Syria is indeed most keen to save the lives of its citizens and continues to take all necessary measures to ensure their safety and security.

In line with those efforts, the Government of Syria opened the new secure corridor in Hamouriyah village, which was liberated from terrorists yesterday in eastern Ghouta. Its aim is to assist the evacuation of civilians who are being used as human shields by terrorist groups. Just yesterday, Thursday, 15 March, more than 40,000 civilians exited eastern Ghouta through the new additional corridor. They went to the Syrian Government, which coordinated with the Syrian Red Crescent, to facilitate their safe transportation to temporary shelters that are equipped with all the necessary resources. They were not transferred to camps, or tents. The Syrian Army, in coordination with

the Russian Reconciliation Centre for Syria, has opened a total of three corridors in Hamouriyah, Jisreen and Wafideen. Yesterday, the Government of Syria also allowed the entry of a joint assistance convoy of the Red Crescent, the Red Cross and the United Nations, made up of 25 trucks carrying 340 tons of various medical and nutritional supplies. The Syrian Government will continue to allow the passage of such convoys, security conditions permitting.

In return for all those efforts undertaken by the Government of Syria to protect its citizens, the armed terrorist groups — upon direct instructions from the Governments of the States supporting them — continue to use civilians as human shields in eastern Ghouta and prevent them from using the corridors as they target them with bullets and missiles. It is quite strange that the Government of Syria is shouldering the huge responsibility of implementing resolution 2401 (2018) and responding to the needs of civilians exiting the inferno of terror in the eastern Ghouta, while the United Nations agencies working in Damascus, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and Governments of other countries that are lamenting the destiny of our civilian population have done nothing materially or morally to alleviate the suffering of tens of thousands of people who have escaped from terrorism. One hundred thousand civilians were displaced in Afrin and around 100,000 fled eastern Ghouta —— a total of almost 200,000 civilians — yet no one has provided them with help.

Some States members of the Security Council are abusing the work of the Council in launching campaigns to defame and spread misinformation about the Government of Syria, especially with respect to the unofficial Arria Formula meeting that the Council held on 12 March. However, I recall that the United Nations is an Organization of Governments and not a theatre for the display of power, and that giving the opportunity to terrorist groups, including the so called White Helmets affiliated with the Al-Nusra Front, to use the platform of the Security Council represents a gross violation of Security Council resolutions, especially those on combating terrorism.

The biggest scandal is that one of the United Nations agencies working in Damascus has asked for the transfer of 76 White Helmets out of eastern Ghouta. It does not care about the tens of thousands of civilians but it cares about 76 White Helmet terrorists. If the Security Council really wants to know about what is happening in Syria, it should ask some of our people who are still living in the city of Raqqa to talk before the Council about the scandals perpetrated against civilians by the outlaw coalition, and its extreme respect for international law after it completely destroyed their city. The coalition has committed the most terrible massacres against civilians, provided protection to 4,000 terrorists affiliated with Da'esh, and facilitated their exit from the city of Raqqa in order to use them somewhere else in Syria. The city of Raqqa is to us what Dresden is to Germany.

The Security Council should also ask to hear from some of our people in Afrin, who could tell its members about the ideal implementation of the provisions of international humanitarian law and resolution 2401 (2018) by the invading Turkish forces that have perpetrated terrible massacres against civilians and displaced tens of thousands of them. The Council should also ask some foreign terrorist fighters who have returned to their countries to explain in an open meeting of the Security Council how the Governments of their countries were actually involved in their recruitment, training and financing and how they provided them with arms and sent them to Syria to commit massacres against the Syrian people. The problem is, however, that these fighters have been recycled, renamed and rebranded as the moderate opposition in Syria.

The Security Council should also ask some of our people who have left eastern Ghouta over the past few days to talk about the terrorist practices of Jaysh Al-Islam, Faylaq Al-Rahman and Ahrar Al-Sham, the three groups that have been called the moderate Syrian opposition by the United States, France, Britain and their agents in the Gulf Sheikhdoms, and to talk in particular about how those groups kill anyone who tries to get out. They have seized all forms of humanitarian and medical assistance and sold it at very high prices. The Council should also ask some of our people from Fo'ah and Kafraya to talk about their years of suffering in the ongoing oppressive siege there, which has been conducted by Al-Nusra Front with direct assistance from Turkey and Qatar. However, it seems that those defenders of humanity have no ears and tongues to listen about the suffering of those civilians and talk about it.

If Western countries in the Security Council were one part in a thousand as sincere as the Russian Federation in their assertions that they really care about the Syrian people and respect the provisions

of the international law, the purposes and principles of the Charter and the Security Council resolutions, particularly those pertaining to combating terrorism, then terrorism would not have emerged in Syria and in other countries. No civilian would have suffered in eastern Ghouta or in eastern Aleppo or in the old city of Homs, Raqqa or any other Syrian city. Those Western countries have invested in terrorism to bring down Iraq, Libya and Yemen. Now, they have also invested in terrorism in Syria and that investment has failed. It is as if these countries were saying that, given a choice between supporting the demons of terrorism, on one the hand, and the Syrian State, on the other, they, the sponsors of terrorism, would choose the demons.

In conclusion, the Government of my country reiterates its principled position that the solution to the Syrian crisis is a political one, based on an intra-Syrian dialogue led by Syria without any foreign interference or preconditions. I have spent hours and hours in negotiations with Mr. De Mistura on those very words in resolution 2254 (2015). I remind Council members that the success of the political track and the tangible enhancement of the humanitarian situation will depend primarily on creating an environment conducive to international and regional commitment to seriously fighting terrorism in Syria and freeing the process from politicization.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.